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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER CHECKLIST FOR VISIT OF PRESIDENT BUSH  
TO COLOMBIA

Classified By: CDA Milton K. Drucker  
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

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Introduction  
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1. (C) Your visit highlights the strength of our bilateral ties, and comes at a critical time for President Uribe. Seven months into his second term, Uribe is looking for a firm U.S. commitment to sustain high aid levels--as well as U.S. congressional approval of our bilateral Free Trade Agreement--to help him finish the fight against narcoterrorism and manage a complex domestic and regional climate. Uribe has been completely supportive of our efforts to locate and rescue the three U.S. hostages held by the FARC. He remains popular, but faces major challenges in ensuring the reintegration of 32,000 demobilized paramilitaries into civilian life, prosecution of human rights violators, reparations for victims of violence, and exposure of former paramilitary links to members of Colombia's political, military and economic elites. He maintains an uneasy, yet cordial, relationship with Venezuelan President Chavez; the election of Rafael Correa as president of Ecuador further complicates the regional environment. Key issues:

- U.S. Support
- U.S. Hostages
- Free Trade
- Paramilitary Investigations
- Drug Eradication
- Colombia's Regional Influence
- Extradition
- Human Rights
- FARC and ELN

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U.S. Support  
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2. (C) U.S. assistance remains vital to help Uribe defeat

narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Uribe presented us with a Plan Colombia Consolidation proposal in January which seeks to lock in sustained, high levels of U.S. and international support over the next five years. The proposal emphasizes continued strong counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts aimed at establishing GOC control throughout the national territory, but also substantially boosts resources for education, health, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and social development. We have publicly welcomed the proposal and are working with Colombia to obtain European support as well. We are also urging Colombia to assume an increasing portion of Plan Colombia components currently financed by the U.S., but little progress has been made to date.

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U.S. Hostages  
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13. (C) The FARC has held three Americans for four years. Uribe has been completely supportive of our efforts to locate and rescue them. The FARC has never indicated a willingness to engage in discussions with the GOC on a humanitarian exchange of hostages for prisoners.

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Free Trade  
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14. (C) Uribe considers FTA ratification essential for Colombia to receive long-term investment, increase economic growth, create jobs, and boost government revenues. He is confident of Colombian congressional approval, but is concerned the U.S. Congress will force renegotiation of the

text signed last November. U.S. failure to approve the FTA soon would be a major domestic and regional political blow to Uribe. It would also boost Venezuelan President Chavez' alternative Bolivarian economic model.

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Paramilitary Investigations  
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15. (C) Uribe's demobilization of the paramilitaries and the improved security situation have allowed Colombia's democratic institutions--the Courts, National Prosecutor, and media--to expose ties between the former paramilitaries and members of Colombia's political elite. Eight members of Congress and the former chief of the FBI-equivalent intelligence service have been arrested for alleged paramilitary ties; one congressmen is on the lam; and five more members of Congress are under investigation. Uribe strongly supports this process even though most of those implicated to date are members of his coalition. Despite the scandal, Colombia's Congress continues to function, with Uribe obtaining passage of most of his legislative agenda in the session that ended in December.

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Drug Eradication  
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16. (C) Uribe is committed to fighting narcotrafficking, but is frustrated record aerial spray numbers are not reducing coca crops. Although Uribe does not know yet, this year the CIA will release data showing an increase in the areas under coca cultivation for the second year in a row. The increase reflects a change in the survey's methodology, not a change on the ground, but the headlines are helping to erode support for eradication efforts. Uribe may ask for greater U.S. resources for the fight.

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Colombia's Regional Influence  
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17. (C) Uribe is working to strengthen economic and security

cooperation with Peru, Brazil, Central America, and Mexico. Colombia's close commercial ties and shared border with Venezuela lead Uribe to maintain cordial relations with Venezuelan President Chavez despite sharp ideological differences, but he vigorously defends Colombia's security and commercial interests. Uribe is reaching out to Ecuador's Rafael Correa, but fears Correa's unpredictable nature and close ties to Chavez will lead to rocky bilateral relations. Cooperation with Colombia's neighbors is vital as the narcoterrorists use the border regions as a safehaven.

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Extradition  
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¶18. (C) Uribe is aware of the high priority the U.S. Congress places on extraditions of drug traffickers. Colombia is the best U.S. partner in the world on extraditions, with over 430 traffickers and terrorists sent to the U.S. since Uribe took office in 2002. Uribe has suspended the extradition of four paramilitaries for narcotrafficking due to their participation in the paramilitary demobilization process.

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Human Rights  
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¶19. (C) Colombia's human rights record is improving, but progress in the prosecution of major human rights violators, especially involving military personnel, is uneven. The U.S. congressionally-mandated human rights certification process requires steady improvement; proposed military justice reform is a positive step. We are helping Colombia implement its unprecedented Justice and Peace Law to achieve truth, justice and reparations. We support Colombia's efforts to reintegrate 32,000 former paramilitaries into civilian life, but these efforts are hampered by the magnitude of the problem and insufficient resources. The lag in reintegration programs and easy money of narcotrafficking and extortion is tempting some ex-paramilitaries back to a life of crime in reformed

gangs. These groups lack the national scope and political ambitions of the defunct United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), but the Colombians must combat them while they remain small.

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FARC and ELN  
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¶10. (C) Increased Colombian military pressure has forced the FARC to withdraw to rural areas and severely weakened its military capabilities, but has not succeeded in compelling the group to start serious peace negotiations. Narcotics trafficking continues to fuel their operations. The families of the FARC's political hostages, including the Americans, are pressing Uribe to negotiate a humanitarian exchange with the FARC. The FARC refuses to provide recent proof of life of its hostages, and insists that the GOC demilitarize an area long ago captured from the FARC before starting talks. The GOC continues peace talks with the ELN, a smaller left-wing terrorist group, but the two have been unable to agree on a cease-fire.

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